

County Borough



of Blackburn.

The Blackburn Free Library Jubilee

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The Blackburn Free Library Jubilee

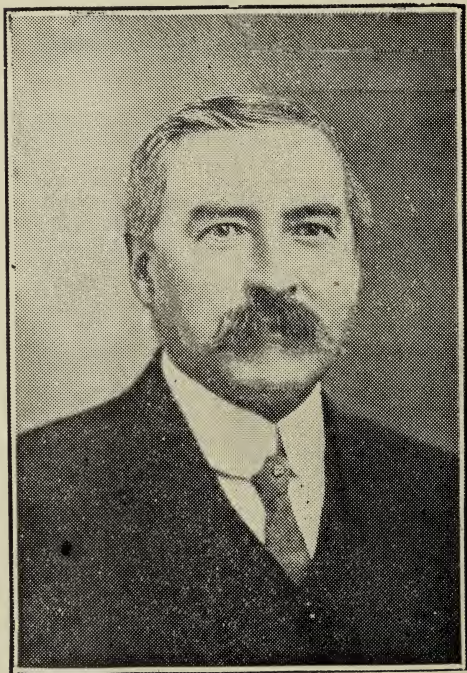
A FIFTY YEARS' RETROSPECT :: OF SUCCESSFUL WORK ::

Not less than half a century ago, books were the luxury of the well-to-do. To-day they are at the service of the multitude. In almost every town of any size or importance one finds a library of some description, and anyone desiring to read need never lack the opportunity. At the present time there is a great reading public with an ever-increasing appetite for paper and print; and it would be difficult, indeed, to gauge the benefit the industrial population of Blackburn have derived during the last 50 years from the Free Library, which, with the Museum and Art Gallery, ranks amongst the most popular and useful institutions of the borough.

Although this is not the fiftieth anniversary of the Library as an established institution, it marks the jubilee year of the inauguration of the movement, the first Library Committee being appointed by the Town Council on March 1st, 1860. They held their initial meeting on March 20th, whilst Mr. Henry Seward was Town Clerk. The committee then comprised, as it does now, members of the Corporation, along with other gentlemen in the town and district. It included Alderman James Cunningham (Mayor), as chairman; Aldermen Hoole, Baron, and Baynes, and Councillors Clough, Duxbury, Lewis, Edmundson, and Coddington. In November of the same year, the Free Library and Museum Committee consisted of Alderman Thwaites (Mayor), Aldermen Baynes, Cunningham, and Hoole; Councillors Clough, T. Lewis, Tiplady, Duxbury, Hopwood, and Hirst; and the Revs. C. W. Woodhouse, J. V. Meany, A. Fraser, H. Cook, and J. B. Lister, along with Mr. J. C. Fielding.

The first step towards providing a public Library was taken in August, 1853, when, on the initiative of Mr. Thos. Clough, a well-

known solicitor of his day, the Town Council agreed to the adoption of the Free Libraries Act of 1850, Blackburn being the seventh town in the country to take this course. On September 15th of the same year there was a meeting of ratepayers, when 430 votes were recorded in favour of the resolution of the Council, the opposition consisting of two individuals only. About this time the Corporation had their hands full. They were engaged in several im-



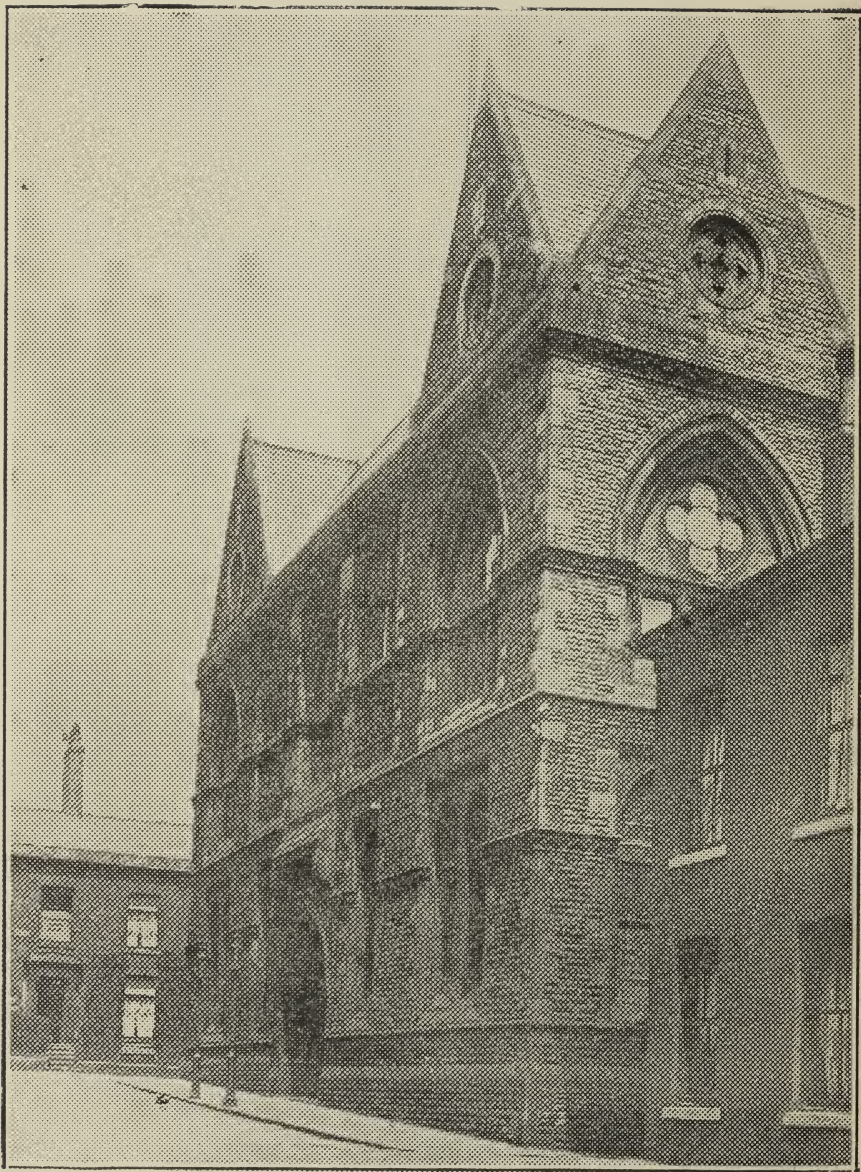
Mr. R. Ashton, the Librarian.

Photo. by F. Burton, Blackburn.

portant local undertakings necessitating a heavy call on the ratepayers, and this led to a decision to allow the library question to lie in abeyance for the time being. Thus it was that six years elapsed before the next step was taken. It was not until October, 1859, that the Act, so heartily agreed to in 1853, was actually put into force. An upper room in the Town Hall was set apart for the reception of over 1,000 volumes, consisting chiefly of Parliamen-

tary works, and these were presented to the town by Mr. James Pilkington, one of Blackburn's representatives at St. Stephen's. Indeed, Mr. Pilkington took quite a fatherly interest in the scheme from the commencement, and much of the success achieved in the initial stages was due to his efforts. He generously presented a complete set of Hansard's Parliamentary Debates to the Library, and these are available to-day in the Reference Department; and he invested £100, the interest accruing therefrom to be specially devoted to the purchase of future copies of Hansard in order that the file might be maintained complete. Alderman John Baynes, Mayor of the borough some little time previously, also interested himself in the movement, and he communicated with the Commissioners of Patents in order to ascertain the terms on which they would supply Blackburn with a complete set of patent specifications. The Commissioners, in reply, offered a full series of their publications on terms identical with those they had granted to other towns, the agreement providing "that the works be deposited in such Public Free Library in the borough as may now exist or may be formed for the purpose, and be open to the inspection of the public daily at all reasonable hours." Prof. Woodcroft was responsible for the communication, and in his letter he observed:—"It may be a curious fact for you to know that out of the list of 2,613 towns, Blackburn stands twenty-fifth on the list as to the number of patents the inhabitants have been granted." The offer was gratefully accepted, the late Alderman Baynes moving that the custody of the books be committed to the Town Hall Committee "until such time as a Free Library is established." To overcome any objection on the ground of expense, he defrayed the cost, amounting to about £150, of supplying cases for the specifications, subsequently supplementing his gift by an additional £50.

The library scheme was launched with marked enthusiasm, the representatives of the rate-payers, as well as the public themselves, according it very hearty support. Among those who took an active interest in the institution was the late Mr. James Cunningham, who gave a donation of £150, and contributed many volumes. On March 27th, 1860, the newly-elected Library Committee appointed the late Mr. W. A. Abram the first librarian—an office he held for seven years. The public inauguration of the Library took place in August, 1860, at a meeting in the Town Hall. The Mayor presided, and among the distinguished visitors present were the late Duke of Devonshire, Sir



EXTERIOR VIEW OF THE FREE LIBRARY.

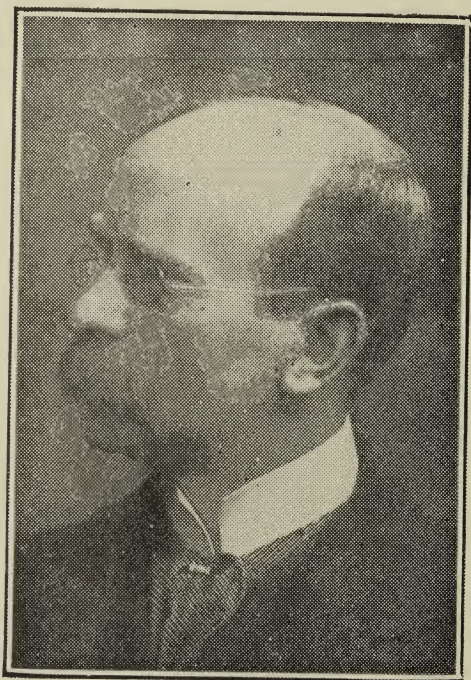
J. P. Kay-Shuttleworth, Bart., Mr. Jas. Pilkington, M.P., and Mr. James Heywood, F.R.S. The local representatives included members of the Corporation, clergy and ministers, and other gentlemen. The speeches on that occasion served to demonstrate the necessity and advantages of a Free Library, and the meeting pledged itself to aid the movement in every possible way. This successful gathering was followed by another chiefly representing the working classes at which resolutions were adopted approving of the steps taken by the authorities. It was also agreed to open a fund for subscriptions, and during the year the movement received a great impetus in the way of donations of both money and books, the operative classes being responsible for the handsome sum of £400 for the purchase of standard works.

The records of the Town Council show that the first rate was laid in March, 1862, of a halfpenny in the £. Nine years later it was increased to a penny, at which figure it has remained ever since.

In 1864, considerations of space led to the removal of the Library from the Town Hall to the Exchange Rooms in Town Hall-street, and it continued there for ten years until the present commodious structure was erected in 1874. The premises in Town Hall-street were found to be totally inadequate to meet increasing requirements, either in the direction of books or the convenience of readers. The committee hesitated a long time, and it was not until 1871 that the project for larger premises took definite shape. The question of land proved more difficult than the one of ways and means. Finally, four sites were deemed suitable and were submitted for approval. These were: A piece of land at the corner of Jubilee-street and Darwen-street; the corner of Mill-lane and Back-lane; a plot near to St. George's Church; and the present site in Library-street. The first choice of the committee was the site in Jubilee-street, but it did not meet with general acceptance, and the Town Council afterwards rescinded their motion, by the casting vote of the Mayor, and changed their plans. In the end, five plots of garden land in Richmond-terrace and Frances-street (now Library-street) were purchased for £1,120, subject to an annual ground rent of £12 18s. When designs were invited for the new building, 38 competitive plans were submitted, the architects including some of the most eminent professional men of the day. The committee made a choice of eight, and relying on the professional advice of Mr. Alfred Waterhouse, of London, the Council

accepted the plans of Messrs. Woodzell and Collcutt, of London, who were commissioned to superintend the erection of the building. The original plans were slightly modified to suit the site, and the available land was increased by the purchase of an additional plot

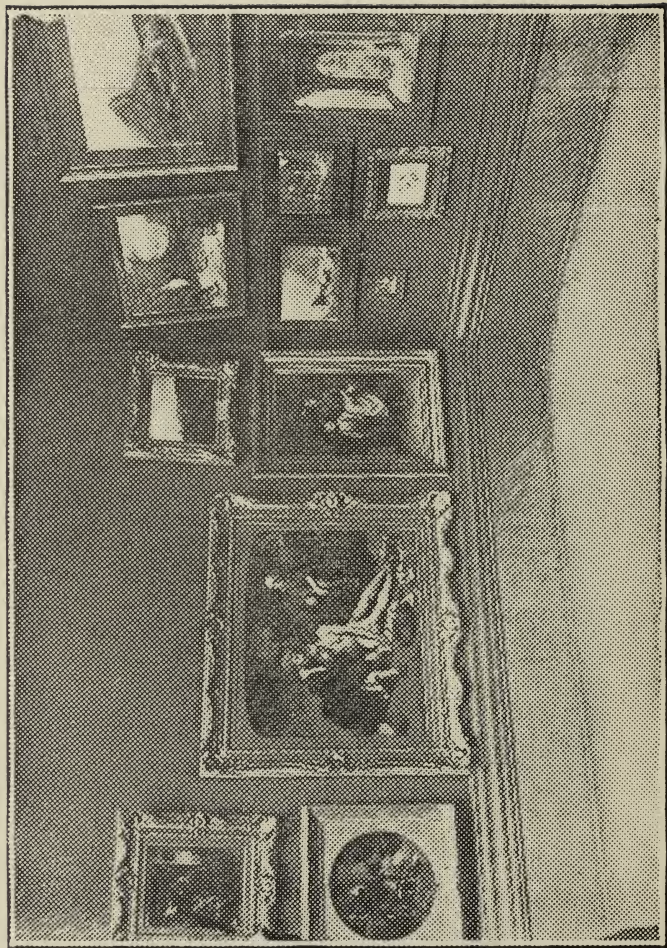
The style of the building is, of course, of the Early Decorated period of Gothic architecture. The entrance is the central feature. It is pro-



Alderman Crossley, J.P., Chairman of the Free Library Committee.

tected by a corbelled-art canopy, decorated with carvings by Mr. G. W. Seale, of London, representative of the heraldic bearings of the original and present manorial owners, and of the Corporation. In the centre, on a shield, are the Borough Arms, surmounted by the crest of the Corporation. On the right of these are the ancient heraldic insignia of the Blackburne family, the original manorial proprietors of Blackburn; and

on the left are the arms and crest of the Feildens of Witton, the present lords of the manor of Blackburn. On each side of the entrance is one single and one double-light window. On the first floor are four triple-light windows, two of them with quatre-foil heads. On the Richmond-terrace front there are, in each storey, six windows corresponding to those on the other front. At each corner of the building there is a gable, set some distance inside the parapets. These, with their roofs, help to break up the main roof and give a very pleasing appearance. The gables have open tracery for ventilation. Under seven of the first-floor windows are panels 10ft. long and 4ft. high. The cost of sculpture work in six of these panels was defrayed by voluntary subscription, the donors being the late Alderman Thompson, chairman of the Free Library Committee; the other members of the Free Library Committee; Mr. W. E. Briggs; Mr. H. M. Fielden; Mr. John Fish (Livezey); and Messrs. John Dugdale and Sons. The centre one over the doorway and the heraldic insignia were included in the building contract. The three sculptured panels on the Library-street front, beneath the window of the upper storey, illustrate, respectively, art, literature, and science. The art panel is typical of music, painting, and sculpture, and the figures are remarkably well grouped. In the two figures representing architecture, the classical and mediæval times are distinguished by the arrangement of the drapery without losing the general mediæval feeling. The centre panel—literature—is illustrated by representative men of the most marked periods, Moses being typical of early Eastern literature; Homer and Plato, classic; Chaucer, the father of English poetry, early English; Shakespeare, unmistakably representing the popular idea of the immortal bard; Milton comes next, whilst Francis Bacon and Newton represent another phase, and Sir Walter Scott depicts modern times. In the grouping in the panel illustrative of science, the figures represent no particular scientist, yet there is symbolised the miner, the engineer and surveyor, and the mechanic, the figures being distinguished by the instruments or tools used in their respective vocations. The four panels on the Richmond-terrace side are filled with figure-sculpture representative of agriculture, of the manufacture of cotton, of the manufacture of iron, and of commerce. On the same frontage, but on the extended portion, the central panel is carved with portraits of British authors and scientists of the second half of the 19th century: Macaulay (representing history), Dickens and Thackeray (fiction), Browning and Tennyson (poetry), Carlyle and Ruskin (criticism), and Owen and Darwin (science).



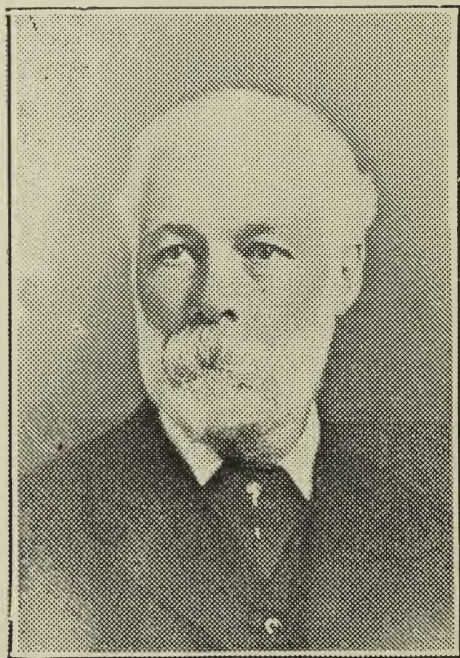
CORNER OF THE ART GALLERY.

The foundation-stone of the premises was laid in 1872 by the then Mayor of the borough, Mr. Thomas Bury. The ceremony was one long to be remembered and was marked by great enthusiasm. A silver trowel was presented to the Chief Magistrate by Alderman Baynes, and he received a handsome mallet from Mr. Thomas Clough. A distinguished gathering of leading townsmen took part in the auspicious event, and memorable speeches were delivered by the Mayor, Mr. H. M. Feilden, M.P., Major Robinson, Canon Birch, Alderman Lewis, Mr. C. Tiplady, Mr. Hornby, M.P., Mr. Thomas Clough, Mr. Richard Eccles, Mr. Beads, Dr. Grosart, and others. Truly, the occasion signalled a red-letter day in the history of Blackburn. The building was opened in 1874 during the Mayoralty of Mr. John Pickop, and a short time afterwards an exhibition was held for the purpose of raising funds to defray the cost of erection, the proceeds realising over £1,000. The total expenditure incurred, including fixtures, amounted to £10,000, and to meet this, as well as to provide for equipment, it was found necessary to borrow a sum of money.

The undertaking, undoubtedly, owes a great deal of its success to the personnel and character of the men entrusted with its management. Mr. William Alexander Abram was the first to be appointed to the position of Librarian, as previously stated, and he held the office from April, 1860, to March, 1867. His final report showed that the institution contained 12,124 books, including 5,636 in the Reference Department, and 6,488 in the lending section, whilst the annual issues had reached 28,776. Although Mr. Abram vacated the position of Librarian, he was closely attached to the work for many years, holding the office of Chairman of the Committee at the time of his death, in May, 1894. Shortly afterwards, Alderman (then Councillor) S. Crossley, the vice-chairman, was appointed in his stead, and still holds that responsible post. He has devoted himself ungrudgingly to the various phases of the work, and has been loyally supported by the self-sacrificing and painstaking gentlemen who have, from time to time, constituted the Committee.

Mr. Abram was succeeded by Mr. David Geddes—a kindly and highly-respected official of considerable literary and scientific tastes, who worked very assiduously for the success and prosperity of the institution. He was closely identified with its progress for a period of 22 years, and at the time of his demise, in October, 1889, the yearly issues had nearly trebled, totalling some 85,763 volumes. A large number of books were added

to the Library during his association with it, and in the year of his deeply deplored death the shelves contained no fewer than 34,561 volumes—17,970 in the Reference Department, and 16,591 in the Lending Department. It is interesting to note that, notwithstanding this large advance in the number of borrowers, the fines imposed for retaining books beyond the specified period, under precisely similar conditions, had declined from £14 3s. in 1867 to £7 13s. 8d. in the



Mr. R. J. Howard, Vice-Chairman of the
Committee.

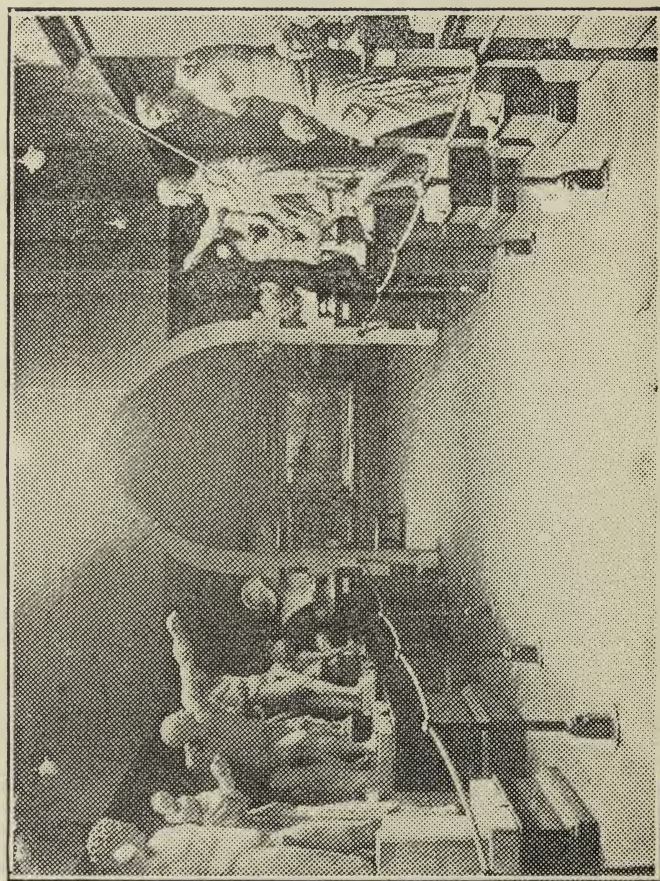
Photo. by R. P. Gregson, F.R.P.S., B'burn & Lytham. year 1885. The final report prepared by Mr. Geddes was of a cheerful and optimistic description, and the mass of information it contained demonstrated the increasing popularity of the institution. "I am pleased to state," wrote Mr. Geddes, "that I am enabled to record satisfactory progress, continued and extended interest, in both the Library and Museum by the community, and to say that at no time have the resources of the institution been more in demand

and appreciated than during the past year; and I venture to hope that, already having succeeded in attaining a position far in advance of the most sanguine expectations held a few years ago, as time goes on, with further additions to the Library and Museum, increasing popularity is sure to ensue. Extension of the present building has been already contemplated to meet the growing requirements of the institution, as both in the Libraries and Museum want of space is becoming apparent. During recent years the increasing attendance of intelligent visitors and students to the reading-room has been very marked, on some evenings every seat being occupied. Besides, many frequent the periodical and current paper stands, of which no record can be taken."

On the death of Mr. Geddes, Mr. Richard Ashton was appointed his successor. For nine years previously he had served as assistant, and his genial aptitude for the work, his obliging disposition, his commendable energy, and his store of literary knowledge, have been largely responsible for the proud position which this important branch of the Corporation has attained. One indication of his successful stewardship is denoted in the increase in the number of books issued during the 21 years he has been in office, and in this particular it is worthy of note that the jubilee of the inauguration of the Library scheme coincides with Mr. Ashton's "majority" as Librarian. The number has risen from 9,689 in the Reference Department and 28,715 in the Lending Department (total, 38,404) in 1862-3, to 30,449 in the Reference Department and 137,943 in the Lending Department (total, 168,392) in 1908-9. It should be mentioned that, prior to 1894, the statistics were compiled according to the number of volumes supplied. After that year a new system was adopted, and the returns denoted the number of works issued from various authors, three or four volumes from one writer only counting as a unit.

In our last issue we dealt with the inauguration of the Library, and partly traced its progress during the last 50 years. On this occasion we particularise other phases of this valuable institution.

As previously stated, the first Library rate amounted to a halfpenny in the £, and was levied on March 1st, 1862. It was increased to a penny in 1871, and has remained at this figure ever since. Although restricted to this extent, the committee have always managed to make additions to the Library and Museum year by year. In 1883, the debt on the building was appraised and a sinking fund established, which,

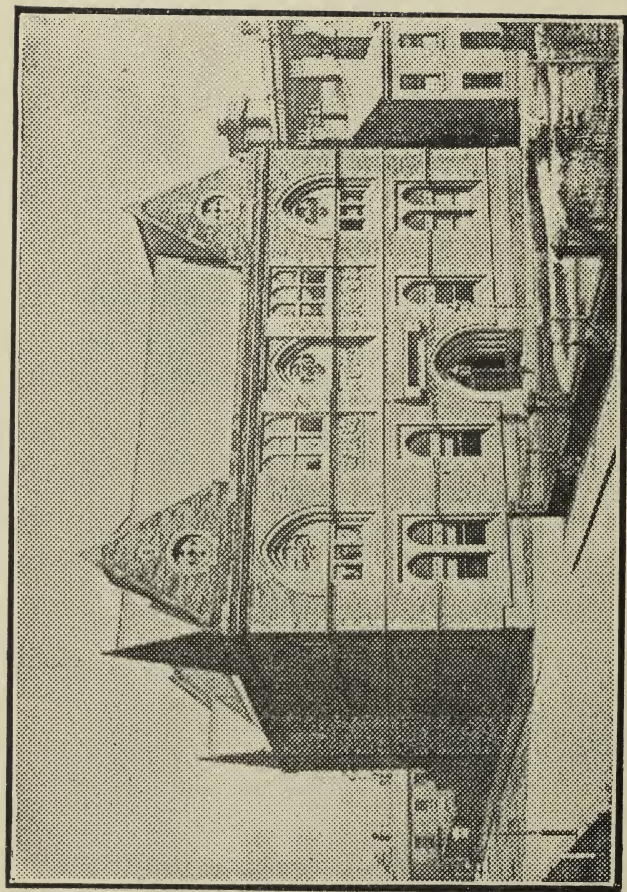


* THE GALLERY OF SCULPTURES.

it was computed, would clear the whole premises from liability in 40 years from that date; but, by rigid economy, this was paid off a few years ago. In 1889 the penny rate placed £1,703 at the disposal of the authorities, and in 1909 it produced £2,216, the farthing rate for the maintenance of the Museum realising last year £495. Being limited to a penny rate, the Committee, originally, found it necessary to contract loans in order to erect the Library buildings, and the interest due under these borrowed sums absorbed, after providing for sinking fund and working expenses, all the rate income. This led to the suggestion to promote the exhibition, referred to in our last issue. The effort was inaugurated on June 11th, 1874, and it was continued for three months. It was patronised by 80,000 visitors, who were greatly interested in the display of pictures, statuary, antiquities, curiosities, and machinery, and the net proceeds amounted to £1,066. Considerable attention was aroused by a second exhibition of art treasures, which was held in 1894. It was, perhaps, the best effort of its kind which the town has ever made. During the period it was open to the public over 27,235 visitors passed through the turnstiles, and whilst it was not the financial success the Committee had anticipated—the receipts being only £706—it resulted in several valuable paintings being given to the town.

Growth of the borough, as well as extended use of the Library, rendered additional accommodation imperative. In the early nineties a scheme of extension was decided upon, and it was expected that the work would be completed in the early part of 1894. A strike of workmen in the building trades, however, which continued during the greater part of the year, not only frustrated this expectation, but also caused the general closing of the Museum and much inconvenience in the general working of the institution.

In the Reference Department the inconvenience to readers, caused by overcrowding, during the winter months, had proved a growing difficulty. This led the Committee to approve of a scheme for converting the portion of the Library formerly used as the librarian's office and for the storing of books, into a newspaper and magazine room; reserving the reading room for the use of students, readers of the higher classes of literature, and persons desiring to make research and consult works of reference. The Reference Department was partitioned by an elaborate screen to secure a portion for the exclusive use of lady readers. Extra storage was provided by exten-

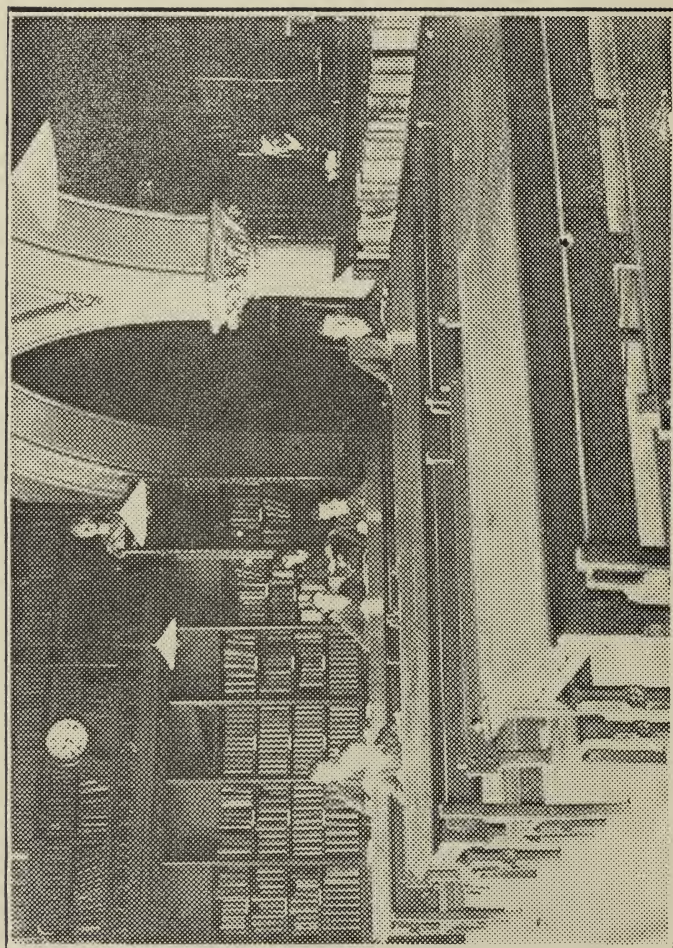


THE LIBRARY WHEN CONSTRUCTED.

photo. by Mr. J. D. Geddes, son of late Librarian.

sions at the rear of the premises on land generously given by Mr. John Pickop, J.P. The well-lighted and convenient rooms on the first floor were utilised for art purposes, the approach to the Art section being through the gallery devoted to Sculpture. The Lending Department was also re-arranged on a more modern plan, the Cotgreave indicator system being introduced; and the Librarian being housed in a more suitable office near to the entrance hall. Other alterations included the remodelling of the stairway to the Museum, the construction of additional storage accommodation over the committee and patent rooms, and the complete renovation of the vestibule and entrance hall, the walls being adorned with panels to represent Labour, Science, Painting, and Poetry.

Until the erection of the present buildings, in 1874, little had been done towards the formation of a Museum worthy of the name. Even after arrangements had been made, its equipment and maintenance were entirely dependent upon the allowance from the Library income; and it was not until 1899, when the Town Council adopted the Museums and Gymnasiums Act, and levied a rate of a farthing in the £ (although possessing the power to levy a halfpenny), that separate funds were forthcoming. The Museum is divided into two sections—Natural History and Industrial Arts. Acting on the advice of those best qualified to give a sound opinion on the subject—"that a museum should be not merely a repository for the benefit of the professed student and specialist, but serve, in an equal measure, for the recreation of the whole mass of the people and for their instruction in the principles of biology"—the Committee resolved to carry out the suggestions made by the late Dr. Gray, Sir William Flower and a number of others. It was agreed that a complete and accurately-named series of the flora and fauna of the neighbourhood should be made, and that the wall cases in the South Museum should be devoted to a collection of Lancashire birds. This collection (258 in number) comprises specimens, in various stages of plumage, of those species which have been met with in a wild state in the county. So far as limited space would permit, the natural surroundings of the birds have been reproduced, and, by employing the best available taxidermists, an endeavour has been made to secure naturally posed groups. Conchology (shells), Mineralogy, and Geology, are each fairly represented, the latter including a good local collection and a particularly fine series of Solenhofen Fossils. The Industrial Arts section embraces objects of

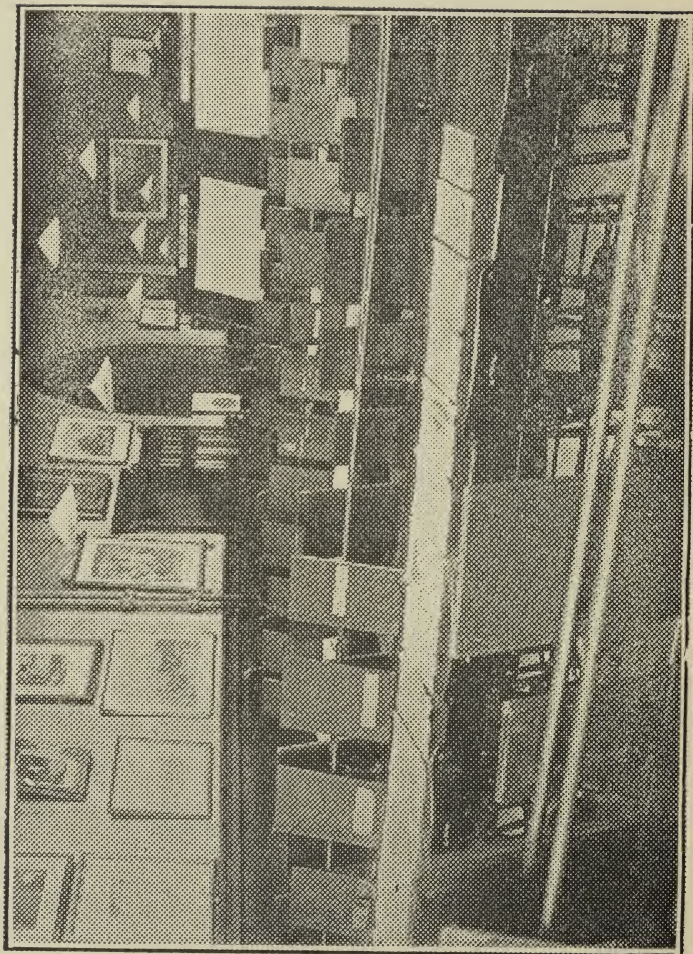


REFERENCE LIBRARY.

antiquity found at Ribchester and Egypt, the latter including pottery dating 2,500 B.C., modern pottery and porcelain; coins and medals; objects and articles illustrating the manners and customs, in peace and war, of various peoples of the world, especially those of Uganda; whilst art metal work in gold, silver, copper, etc., is represented by a selection of electrotypes. Valuable exhibits from the Board of Education are also received annually. The extensions to the buildings in 1894 were carried out to form Art and Sculpture galleries, the nucleus of a permanent collection of pictures having already been made by the handsome gift of the "Dodgson" collection, which embraced choice examples of the Early English School of water-colour drawing and a number of oilpaintings. The gift was valued at about £10,000. The Committee had already secured a few others, but at the inaugural exhibition many important additions were made by gift and purchase. Loan exhibitions of choice works are also held from time to time. The Sculpture gallery is decorated with casts of originals from the Parthenon Frieze, and contains a selection of casts from the antique and originals of modern work.

Anticipating the wants of the residents in the outlying districts, the Committee have provided delivery stations, and the following figures show the number of issues from each last year:—Audley, 3,858; Bank Top, 2,678; Bastwell, 3,680; Dukes Brow, 14 292; Ewood, 4,341; Furthergate, 3,374; Guide, 1,252; and Mill Hill, 4,384; total, 37,859. Since 1899 the children of the public elementary schools have also been provided for, 35 departments being supplied with a selection of books in proportion to the number of children attending each school.

The total sum expended on the Library buildings up to March 25th, 1909, was £18,389 0s. 3d. This amount included £6,848 14s. 0d. which was devoted, in 1894, to the new Art Gallery and Museum. Later, additional land in Richmond-terrace and Tacketts-street was acquired at a cost of £2,565 4s. 2d., and this will be utilised for extension purposes as the necessity arises. It is now let by the Committee, and it brings in a useful income of £60 per year. The books acquired by the Library Committee, apart from private gifts, involved, up to July last year, an expenditure of £10,476 8s. 9d. In 1899-1900, no fewer than 2,592,251 volumes had been issued from the Library since its establishment, and according to last year's report this number had increased to 3,970,695—3,845,701 in the Reference and Lending Departments, and 124,994 from the schools. The public are also given access to



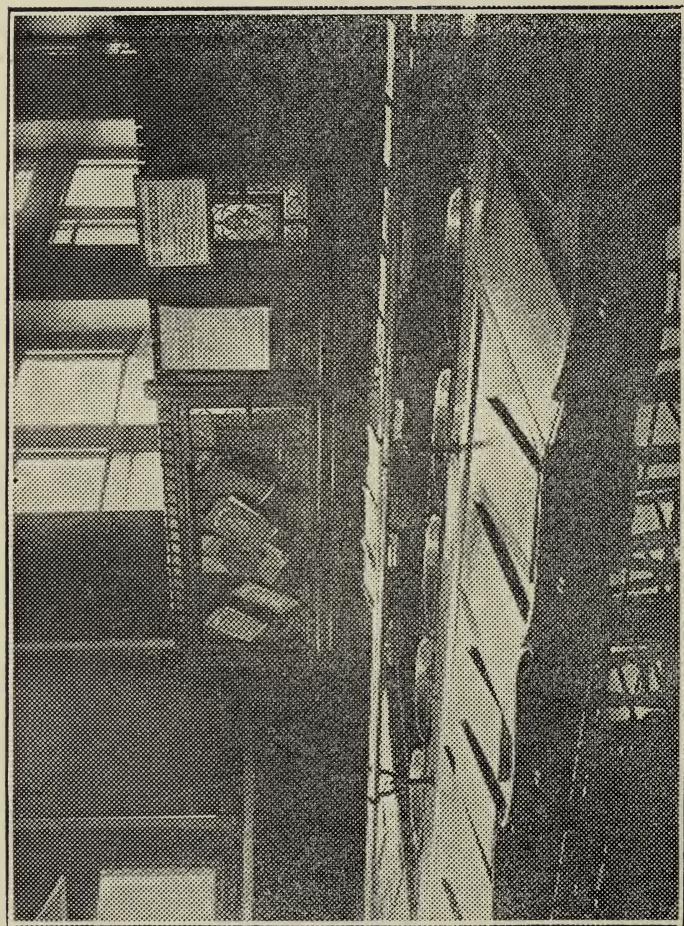
THE GENERAL NEWSROOM.

20 leading newspapers each day; 99 weekly periodicals; two by-weeklies; 86 monthlies; four by-monthlies; and five quarterlies.

During the librarianship of Mr. Ashton, two members of his staff have obtained situations as Librarians in other parts of the country, Mr. T. Duckworth being appointed to Worcester, and Mr. J. Pomfret to Darwen. The present staff consists of Mr. R. Ashton (Librarian), Mr. J. Hindle (Sub-Librarian), Miss A. Backhouse, Messrs. W. Coupland, W. Thomas, W. T. Thornber, E. Senior, F. Eastham, assistants; Mr. E. Metcalf, porter; and Mr. T. Gornall, museum attendant; whilst those in charge of the delivery stations are Messrs. A. Palin, T. Houghton, J. H. Campbell, T. Brogden, J. Corbridge, T. Hawkins, E. Holden, and J. Slater.

To mention all who have contributed to the success of the Library departments during the last 50 years would involve the compilation of a formidable list of townsmen and well-wishers. The present pile of buildings, with its valuable store of material inside, to which the humblest have free and easy access, is the outcome of their collective labours, and as long as the borough remains their self-sacrificing and noble services will never be forgotten.

Considerations of space forbid us entering into a detailed description of the various departments of the Library and Museum, but there are a number of striking features which call for comment. One of the most interesting sections of the reference library—and one about which, we fear, many residents are unaware—is that devoted to the collection of local works. It consists of over 800 items, ranging from the humble pamphlet and report to recognised works of local authors. This collection was commenced by the late Mr. Geddes, and recognising its value, Mr. Ashton has spared no effort to develop it to the fullest extent, and at the present time an endeavour is being made to secure a copy of every tract or book printed in Blackburn, any dealing with the borough, or written by a resident of the town. The Librarian told our representative this week that he would appreciate very highly the humblest contribution of works of this description from residents who might possess such, whilst photographs and memoranda of historical value were especially welcome. Already quite a number of bazaar handbooks containing illustrated accounts of church progress and biographies are stored carefully away, and not the least interesting of the collection is a series of photographs of Blackburn's great flood, with all the Press matter relating thereto.



LADIES' NEWSROOM.

Some ten years ago, Mr. Ashton introduced a system of filing newspaper biographies of local townspeople, and now quite a valuable compilation of these articles are at the disposal of readers. Another section worthy of special note consists of a file of complete specifications of patents which date from 1617, when the first patent was granted, down to 1888, and since which date, the abridgements have been received weekly, as published.

In 1907, Mr. Ashton applied to the controller of the Government Patent Office for a grant of the "Trade Marks Journal." The request was readily acceded to, and the full record from this date are now in the Library. We have already referred to the collection of Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, dating from 1072 down to the present year, and these, with many other useful volumes, are available to all.

It would be ungrateful, indeed, were we to conclude without acknowledging our deep obligation to Mr. Ashton, the librarian, for the store of information he has supplied concerning the proud history of the useful institution over which he has had charge so long. Anxious that the Library should fulfil, to the strict letter, the purpose for which it was erected, he invites every class of student and reader to take full advantage of the many opportunities which it affords for research and education; whilst business people and other classes of the community would receive courteous and ready assistance in any difficulty or inquiry which might lie within the scope of a public department of this character.



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